

ABSTRACT**INFORMATION STORAGE AND RETRIEVAL**

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An information retrieval apparatus for searching a set of information items and displaying the results of the search, the information items each having a set of characterising information features. The apparatus comprises a search processor operable to search the information items in accordance with a user defined characterising information feature and to identify information items having characterising information features corresponding to that user defined characterising information feature. A mapping processor is operable to generate data representative of a map of information items from a set of information items identified in the search. The map provides the identified information items with respect to positions in an array in accordance with a mutual similarity of the information items, similar information items mapping to similar positions in the array. The apparatus includes a graphical user interface for displaying a representation of at least some of the identified items, and a user control for selecting an identified information item. The search processor is operable to refine the search to identify information items relating to the selected information item. As such the user is provided with a facility for refining a search by identifying desired information items with respect to items revealed as positions within the array which are mutually similar. Searching and navigating large amounts of data are thereby made easier.

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Figure 8.